



Senator Ben Nelson
440 North 8th Street, Suite 120
Lincoln, NE 68508

Dear Senator Nelson:

This letter is in support of Southeast Nebraska Behavioral Health Information Network's (SNBHIN) request for earmarked funds which would assist in the purchase of Electronic Health Record (EHR) applications to more fully integrate the Health Information Exchange (HIE) system currently in development for behavioral health providers in southeast Nebraska.

As the Vice President for Regional Development and Strategic Planning for BryanLGH Health Systems, I have been closely involved for more than five years in the planning and resource development to make this system a reality. BryanLGH operates a behavioral health emergency department and offers inpatient care for behavioral health patients. We have a close knit relationship with behavioral health providers in the network and are convinced of the benefits in patient safety and care that will be a product of better access to timely and accurate information, especially in cases of emergency.

Although SNBHIN will be able to access Stimulus Funding to purchase the hardware and software needed for Health Information Exchange (HIE), the capital requirements to purchase electronic health record applications is still beyond the reach of the providers served in our Network. The stimulus funding available cannot be utilized to purchase EHR applications.

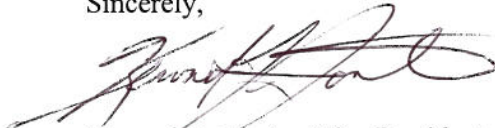
The Regional Behavioral Health Authority has set aside \$429,000 in funding to help acquire these EHR systems. This commitment represents roughly half of the resources needed. Although the providers will make contributions toward purchase, the \$250,000 in earmark funds will make it far more affordable for the providers to acquire the applications. The providers have expressed a willingness to contribute ongoing costs of maintaining the system once the applications have been acquired. These applications will make it possible to operate more effectively and utilize the time invested in service documentation to the highest level. An integrated health information exchange system will significantly improve our ability to treat Nebraska citizens with behavioral health conditions in a number of ways.

- Consumers may be on multiple waiting lists for behavioral health services some of which may or may not be appropriate. An integrated HIE system would provide us with an avenue to research the consumer's position on other agencies' waiting lists and promote communication with other behavioral health agencies to expedite the delivery of services based on consumer need.
- The network of behavioral providers in Region V would greatly benefit from the automatic uploading capability of consumer information into the HIE system from the EHR applications. This function will allow us to automatically upload information of consumers who are enrolled as Medicaid clients with Magellan, the administrative support agency contracting with Nebraska Health and Human Services Department NHHS, or consumers enrolled as clients of the NHSS Division of Behavioral Health. Currently, each behavioral health provider must enter the required consumer-related information for each entry into service. System efficiencies will be experienced if consumer data is automatically uploaded upon entry into service.

- The Network's ability to coordinate health and behavioral health will improve with the HIE system's ability to manage chronic conditions using consumer lists and decision support. Our clinicians will be able to utilize decision support functionality embedded in these applications to deliver consistent care incorporating evidence based practices for each and every patient served.
- Safety for the consumers will improve with easy access to up-to-date medical records which will provide easy access to essential and accurate information in emergency situations.
- Reduction in disparate health outcomes for consumers of behavioral healthcare services will be experienced through sharing of behavioral health records with primary healthcare providers.

SNBHIN's leadership in the development of an HIE system has been aggressive and successful. National, state, and local funding sources have invested in the HIE system and still more funds are needed. We urge you to consider an earmark for this project which will improve the efficiencies and effectiveness of the behavioral health system in Southeast Nebraska, provide a roadmap for the adoption of a behavioral health HIE system for the rest of the state and most importantly improve the quality of life for Nebraska citizens with behavioral health conditions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Kenneth L. Foster", with a stylized, flowing script.

Kenneth L. Foster, Vice President
Regional Development & Strategic Planning